United Nations E/CN.17/IFF/1999/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 February 1999

Original: English

Commission on Sustainable Development
Intergovernmental Forum on Forests
Third session
Geneva, 3–14 May 1999

Programme element I.b

Promoting and facilitating the implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests

Monitoring progress in implementation

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Systematic reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress in the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forest have two aspects: to assess progress in legislation, policies, programmes and processes, and to assess progress in the state of all types of forests at the national, regional and global levels. The value of information lies in how it is collected, analysed, synthesized and reported. Reviewing, monitoring and reporting activities should be primarily aimed at benefiting national policy, planning and field operations, and action needs to focus on further capacity-building. Coordination, streamlining of data collection and reporting, and harmonization of concepts and terminology at the international level would result in cost-effective and efficient operations and provide opportunities to generate national, eco-regional, regional and global assessments. There are opportunities to build upon the existing mechanisms for periodic assessment and reporting within and outside the United Nations systems, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations forest resource assessment 2000, the *State of the World's Forests* and the national reporting mechanism of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Criteria and indicators are expected to become increasingly useful tools for monitoring and reporting on future progress towards sustainable forest management.

99-04251 (E) 160399

Contents

		Paragraphs	*Page*
I.	Introduction	1–4	3
II.	General overview of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the background discussion at the third session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests	5–11	3
III.	Major issues	12–61	4
	A. Mechanisms, process and format for reviewing, monitoring and reporting	12–50	4
	1. Legislation, policies, programmes and processes	12–29	4
	2. Trends in the state of all types of forests	30–50	6
	B. Integration of reporting systems among processes and instruments	51–54	9
	C. Involvement of major groups	55	9
	D. Technical, financial and political constraints	56–61	10
IV.	Preliminary conclusions and options for further action	62–65	10

I. Introduction

1. The establishment of reliable mechanisms for reviewing, monitoring and reporting is important for any process aimed at measuring progress towards sustainable forest management at the national, regional and global levels. A few existing and well-established mechanisms already provide periodic assessment and reporting on forests. Many of these were described in some detail in the note by the Secretariat on programme element I.b prepared for the second session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) (E/CN.17/IFF/1998/6).

2. The value of reviewing, monitoring and reporting lies primarily at the national level, where it allows for an evaluation of current forest policy as well as for an assessment of how the state of forests impacts the ecological, economical and social situations of the country, at national as well as subnational levels. Developing and strengthening of institutional, technical and human capacities are prerequisites to accrue this value. This requires major effort and cooperation in a range of areas, many of which do not enjoy high priority or are currently inadequately developed, particularly in developing countries.

3. Information related to forests is and will continue to be needed for many purposes, such as for national forest programmes, the criteria and indicator processes, as well as for many existing environmental conventions. There are already ongoing discussions about reporting on certain aspects of forests in some existing legally binding instruments. The impact of reporting obligations on the valuation and ultimate management of forests should not be underestimated, especially if the information is linked to the measuring of progress towards compliance with obligations and/or to a financial mechanism.

4. The present report recapitulates the discussions on this topic that took place in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) as well as during the second session of IFF, when this topic received background discussion. Based on the guidance provided by the Forum at the second session, the present report provides preliminary proposals for reporting on legislation, policies, programmes and processes on the one hand and trends in the state of all types of forest on the other. It also includes a short discussion of the integration of reporting systems among various processes and instruments, as well as the technical, financial and political constraints to reviewing, monitoring and reporting on forests. It concludes by proposing a few options for further action.

II. General overview of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the background discussion at the third session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

Programme element I.a

5. At its second session, the Forum reviewed progress in the implementation of the IPF proposals for action during its substantive discussion of programme element I.a, and it concluded that sustainable development is a long-term process and goal, and that within a limited time-frame since the conclusion of IPF deliberations countries would not be able to show substantial progress in capacity-building, policy development, planning processes and creation of enabling and supporting infrastructures. The Forum underlined the need for sustained efforts in implementing the IPF proposals for action. The Forum identified a set of factors needed for progress in implementation, such as financial resources and technical assistance; strengthening of partnerships; participation by all interested parties in development and implementation of national forest programmes; systematic assessments; and political commitment.

Programme element I.b

6. In its report on its fourth session (E/CN.17/1997/12), IPF concluded that there is a need for a broad set of reliable data of high integrity, covering social, cultural, economic, ecological, institutional and legal aspects of forests, in order to have an adequate grasp of progress as well as of the impact of the state of forests on the environment, human well-being and the economy. Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management were identified by IPF as constituting one important tool for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on trends.

7. Programme element I.b is defined as follows:

> "*Monitor progress in implementation*. Consider the mechanisms, process and format for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on progress; and assess progress in implementation, *inter alia*, by countries, United Nations agencies, other international organizations and major groups, including the private sector, and indigenous people, forest dwellers, forest owners and local communities" (see E/CN.17/IFF/1997/4, para. 7, category I(b)).

8. At the second session of IFF, programme element I.b was subjected to background discussion on the basis of a note by the Secretariat (E/CN.17/IFF/1998/6). The result of the discussion was a non-negotiated Co-Chairmen's summary reflecting the discussion (see E/CN.17/IFF/1998/14, sect. I.B) and guidance to the Secretariat for preparations for the third session.

9. At its second session, the Forum decided that at its third session it should consider options for reporting on progress in the implementation of the IPF proposals for action on the conservation, management and sustainable development of all types of forests. It also suggested that in the short term, monitoring of progress in implementing the IPF proposals for action at the national, regional and global levels could be accomplished through the following three activities:

(a) The voluntary system of national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development, reflecting the Commission's multi-year programme of work, which will include forests in the year 2000 and as part of the comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in 2002;

(b) The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) survey to be undertaken by FAO in 1998 on progress in individual countries towards the implementation of their national forest programmes;

(c) The data generated by the global forest resource assessment, coordinated by FAO in cooperation with other relevant organizations and initiatives, to contribute to monitoring the state of all types of forests.

10. The Forum also encouraged FAO and other relevant organizations and initiatives to elaborate further elements of a reporting system, identifying and integrating the reporting demands placed by all forest-related processes and instruments. It also noted that there is considerable scope for cooperation and coordination among FAO, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention to Combat Desertification, UNEP and the Commission for the sharing of forest-related information and thereby avoiding duplication in data collection. In particular, efforts must be intensified to harmonize concepts, definitions, methodologies and measurement standards.

11. To some extent these suggestions are being implemented. For example, in 1998, the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change hosted, at FAO headquarters in Rome, a workshop on land use, land-use change and forestry. Concurrently , the Convention also held a meeting at FAO in Rome to develop the outline for a special report on land use, land-use change and forestry. This could ensure that forest-related reporting does not result in duplication of data collection as well as contradictory definitions and non-harmonized methodologies. It should also be noted that the Convention has a national reporting system (national communications) which will increasingly include information on forestry issues and activities as the application of the Kyoto Protocol is clarified.

III. Major issues

A. Mechanisms, process and format for reviewing, monitoring and reporting

1. Legislation, policies, programmes and processes

FAO survey of national forest programmes

12. The FAO proposal to carry out a survey on the status and progress in the implementation of national forest programmes was endorsed by IFF at its second session. IFF noted that monitoring of progress in implementing the IPF proposals for action in the short term could be accomplished through the voluntary system of national reporting to the Commission, reflecting the Commission's multi-year programme of work, which will include forests in the year 2000 and as part of the comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in 2002, as well as the FAO survey that will be undertaken by FAO in 1998 on countries' progress in implementing national forest programmes.

13. National forest programmes under various strategic frameworks and with varying approaches are being implemented in some 123 countries. The purpose of the survey is to:

(a) Assess the status and progress of those national forest programmes which in the last 12 years have moved to some extent from declarations of intent to implementation of the strategies, policies, plans and action programmes;

(b) Draw guidance, from the experience obtained by countries in the implementation of their strategic frameworks, which may be useful to other countries and to the international community to foster and improve the development of national forest programmes.

14. The FAO assessment will cover all countries, i.e., developed, developing and countries with economies in transition, which have formulated any type of forest sector strategic frameworks based on principles of sustainable

forest management. FAO is, within the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests, responsible for facilitating the implementation of IPF proposals for action.

15. At the time of writing, some preliminary results from the survey were made available to the IFF secretariat by FAO. The preliminary results are based on information available from 174 countries, of which 133 have some type of strategic planning framework, as defined by IPF in broad generic terms.

16. Twenty-four of the 48 countries in the African region provided updated information to the survey. It is known that while 40 countries have a strategic planning framework (SPF) for forests, eight do not. Of the 40 strategic planning frameworks, 34 are national forest action plans (NFAPs); of those, some have additional plans, five have national environmental action plans (NEAPs) and three have national desertification control plans. The six remaining countries have other types of SPFs (three forestry sector review (FSRs)/forestry master plans (FMPs), one NDCP, one national environmental management plan and one forestry and wildlife resources management plan). In the countries with some sort of SPF for forests, 19 are active and 21 are inactive, i.e., either there is no progress in implementation or they have not progressed beyond the planning stage.

17. All 32 countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region have strategic planning frameworks. In 31 countries, the SPFs are in the form of NFAPs, of which 18 are active and 13 are either progressing slowly or have remained inactive since the planning phase.

18. Excluding the eight Central Asian and Caucasian countries, for which information is unavailable, the remaining 33 countries in the Asia and Pacific region have up-to-date information. While 26 of those have a strategic planning framework, seven do not. Of the 26 countries with an SPF, 14 are NFAPs, seven are FMPs and five correspond to other types of SPFs. Twenty of those countries have ongoing strategic planning frameworks for forests and six either foresee little progress in implementation or have remained at the planning stage.

19. Of the 25 countries in the Near East region, only four appear to have a strategic planning framework, two with NFAPs, one with an FSR and one with an FMP; all four are active.

20. Information is available on 33 of the 42 countries in Europe. This information indicates that 28 countries have some type of strategic framework for forests. Of those only five responded to internationally agreed frameworks — one national biological diversity conservation strategy, one national biodiversity action plan and three national sustainable development programmes. The rest were national schemes of various types, most of them being actively pursued.

21. Of the three countries in North America, one has an NFAP and the other two have various national and subnational strategic frameworks, all active.

22. The FAO assessment will be forward looking, and will be carried out in the light of the basic principles and operational guidelines published by FAO in 1996, as well as the specific elements to be considered during the development and implementation of national forest programmes, as endorsed by IPF (see E/CN.17/1997/12). FAO will make the results of the full assessment available to IFF at its third session.

National reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development

23. As noted above, IFF noted at its second session that in the short term, monitoring of the progress in the implementation of the IPF proposals for action could also be accomplished through the voluntary system of national reporting to the Commission. This would be accomplished within the Commission's multi-year programme of work, which will include forests in the year 2000 and as part of the comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in 2002. Currently, there is information on forests from some 95 countries, that will be updated for the Commission in 2000.[1]

24. Considering the guidelines for reporting on other sectors (e.g. oceans and seas) issued for the fourth session of the Commission by the Division for Sustainable Development, such a national report on forests could include such topics as:

(a) Decision-making, including structure of decision-making; strategies, policies and plans; major programmes; legislation, regulations and policy instruments; and involvement of major groups in decision-making;

(b) Status, including areas and current uses; contribution to the economy; approaches in place to encourage sustainable management; trade; and impact of other sectors;

(c) Capacity-building: institutions, research, education, training and awareness-raising;

(d) Constraints;

(e) Technology;

(f) Information;

(g) Financing;

(h) International cooperation.

25. Guidelines with specific reference to forests will be prepared for the eighth session of the Commission, in the year 2000. These guidelines will be formulated in cooperation with FAO, the task manager within the Inter-Agency Committee for Sustainable Development for chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles, along the lines described below.

Complementarity between the FAO survey and national reporting to the Commission

26. Currently, the FAO 1998 survey of national forest programmes is a once-only exercise, which may be repeated periodically as deemed necessary. An earlier analysis, carried out in 1994 as a stock-taking exercise under the tropical forests action programme, did not include Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The FAO survey in 1998 will provide timely, in-depth information relevant to the substantive discussion under IFF programme element I.b, as well as to the follow-up discussion under programme element I.a. Several aspects of the FAO 1998 survey could provide valuable information to the Commission's national reporting exercise. Since both are based on information provided by Governments there should be ample scope for streamlining. Every effort will be made to formulate the guidelines for the national reports in such a manner that it generates information that permits insightful synthesis.

27. There is every indication that the national reporting to the Commission could become a regular feature as part of its multi-year programme of work. This, as well as any follow-up mechanism to IFF, will determine the need or otherwise for future in-depth national forest programme surveys and analyses. Future special, in-depth surveys may be required only for certain aspects of national forest programmes, such as participatory approaches, transfer of technology, international cooperation and traditional knowledge. The outcome of such special in-depth surveys could be published through FAO's biannual *State of the World's Forests*.

28. Since FAO is the task manager for chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles in the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, there is considerable scope for these two reviews to be highly synchronized, resulting in streamlining of reporting by governments, now and in the future.

29. Information on financial resources provided for forest-related activities is one issue which warrants particular attention. It has been difficult for both FAO and the Commission to acquire reliable data on financial flows from either private or public sources. In order to make realistic recommendations related to financing, countries are encouraged to pay particular attention to those questions in both the FAO national forest programme survey and the Commission's national reporting guidelines (for further discussion of this issue, see E/CN.17/IFF/1999/4).

2. Trends in the state of all types of forests

Regional-level criteria and indicators

30. While criteria collectively characterize the general concept of sustainable forest management, indicators can be assessed and regularly monitored over time, and help to evaluate the state of forest as well as the overall effects of forest management interventions with a view to undertaking gradual improvement in management practices. Within the framework of a number of initiatives focused on the regional and eco-regional levels, work has continued with emphasis on the development, pilot scale testing, and implementation of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management at the national level. Recently, work at the national level has been complemented by early development of commonly agreed forest management unit level criteria and indicators, which are currently being discussed by all ongoing regional and international processes.

31. The activities of a number of the ongoing criteria and indicators initiatives are coordinated by FAO, working in close collaboration with other international partners, notably UNEP, in facilitating country-driven action. Close collaboration between these and the other initiatives is facilitated through mutual invitations to meetings and workshops, and through regular dissemination of information among initiatives by FAO in its role as the lead agency for work related to criteria and indicators within the framework of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests.

32. Recent developments have pointed to the need for further development and testing of the national level indicators identified to date, as well as for clarifying and streamlining assessment methodologies. Experience shows that there is also a need to further clarify the linkages between national and forest management unit level criteria and indicators. It is generally agreed that while not all national-level criteria and indicators are applicable at the forest management unit level, the criteria and indicators identified at those two levels should be mutually compatible. However, there is an acknowledged need to further strengthen the links between the various initiatives to promote continued comparability between them. There is also a need to further accelerate action towards field-level

implementation in countries engaged in the different initiatives. There is considerable commonality in the conceptual framework of various criteria and indicator processes, and thus there are opportunities to integrate the generated information into the FAO forest resource assessment for the year 2000 (FRA 2000), national reporting to the Commission etc. to increase cost-effectiveness and collection of useful information.

33. More than 100 countries covering all types of forests are engaged in formulating and field testing criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. A status report is set out below on the eight main ongoing international initiatives, based on a December 1998, FAO Forestry Department information note on the subject.[2]

34. *Pan-European Process on Criteria and Indicators for Sustainable Forest Management ("Helsinki Process")*. At the Third Ministerial Conference at Lisbon in June 1998, the six national-level criteria identified within this initiative were officially adopted for national implementation. The corresponding indicators were endorsed in principle as a basis for international reporting and for the development of national indicators, committing participating countries to their further development, improvement and implementation. The Ministers endorsed and committed themselves to continue revision of the voluntary pan-European operational-level guidelines for sustainable forest management. The Ministers also endorsed, in principle, the work programme on conservation and enhancement of biological and landscape diversity in forest ecosystems 1997–2000, which is to be coordinated by the Ministers responsible for the Environment in European countries.

35. *Montreal Process on Criteria and Indicators for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests*. The original 10 participating countries (later on increased to 12) have endorsed seven non-legally binding national level criteria and 67 indicators, contained in the Santiago Declaration of February 1995. The first approximation report on implementation, published in August 1997, provided an analysis of the relevance of the identified criteria and indicators to individual participating countries and reviewed the availability of corresponding data. At the 13th meeting of the Montreal Process, held in October 1998, participating countries agreed to review and also consider in the future possible elements for criteria and indicators at the forest management unit level.

36. The *Tarapoto Proposal for Criteria and Indicators for Sustainability of the Amazon Forest* was adopted in February 1995 at Tarapoto, Peru, in a meeting held under the auspices of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty. Following initial review in each of the participating countries, national consultations for validation have been organized over the past two years by five of the seven participating countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela) and similar consultations are also planned by the other two (Brazil and Suriname). Within the framework of the Tarapoto Proposal, a second initiative-wide meeting is planned for 1999.

37. The *Dry-Zone Africa Process* was initiated through a United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)/FAO expert meeting on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, held at Nairobi in November 1995. In a workshop held in November 1997, participating countries reviewed national reports on applicability, availability of information, and national capacities for collection and analysis of data. Those countries also elaborated a plan of action for further work. A subregional UNEP/FAO follow-up meeting of national coordinators for criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in dry-zone Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, held at Lilongwe, Malawi, in December 1998, was aimed at further reviewing progress and promoting testing and implementation. Reports on the initiative are regularly made to the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission, which has endorsed in principle the work carried out within this initiative.

38. The *Near East Process* was initiated through an FAO/UNEP expert meeting on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management held at Cairo in October 1996. In a follow-up workshop organized at Cairo in July 1997, national coordinators reviewed reports from participating countries on the applicability, availability of information and national capacities for collection and analysis of data, and elaborated a proposal for future action. A follow-up meeting of national coordinators was held at Damascus in December 1998 to further review progress and to promote testing and implementation by countries concerned. Reports on the initiative are regularly made to the Near East Forestry Commission, which has endorsed in principle work carried out within this initiative.

39. The *Lepaterique Process of Central America* was initiated following the recommendations of an expert meeting on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, organized at Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in January 1997 by the Council for Forests and Protected Areas (CCAB-AP) of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, with the support of FAO. The meeting was followed by two subregional training workshops and seven national seminars, which reviewed applicability to and availability of data in participating countries, and made recommendations on future

implementation. Based on experiences to date, a CCAB-AP/FAO validation exercise is planned for 1999, in which a systematic evaluation of the relevance and applicability of the identified criteria and indicators in individual countries will take place.

40. Recently, *the International Tropical Timber Organization* (ITTO) reviewed and revised the criteria for sustainable management of tropical moist forests endorsed by ITTO member countries in 1992. The approved revisions were published in the document, "Criteria and indicators for sustainable management of natural tropical forests".[3]

41. During the past years, *the African Timber Organization* (ATO) has helped to identify and test national and field-level principles, criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in member countries, with due consideration of other ongoing initiatives and maintaining relevant international links.

42. In summary there are 38 countries active in the Pan-European Process, 12 in the Montreal Process, eight in the Tarapoto Proposal, seven in the Lepaterique Process, 29 in the Near East Process, 28 in the Dry-Zone Africa Process, 13 in the African Timber Organization, 49 in ITTO and 14 in the newest initiative, the SADC "Initiative on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in the framework of the Dry-Zone Africa Process". It should be noted that some countries are active in more than one initiative.

43. There are opportunities to integrate the information collected through these processes into overall assessment of the state of forests and progress towards sustainable forest management at the subnational, national, regional and global levels.

Scientific underpinning, testing and implementation

44. Many of the ongoing criteria and indicators processes have established technical committees to ensure scientific soundness of approach. At the international level, FAO, in collaboration with the International Union of Forest Research Organisations (IUFRO), organized an international conference on indicators for sustainable forest management, on the theme "Fostering stakeholder input to advance development of scientifically based indicators", held at Melbourne, in August 1998. The conference reviewed the overall scientific basis for work in this field and identified related research needs.

45. Focusing largely on research aspects, the Centre for International Forestry Research is engaged in the identification and testing of criteria and indicators at the forest management unit level. The work is carried out in collaboration with national institutes in a number of developed and developing countries. The project aims at developing methodologies as well as scientifically sound, practical guidelines for the assessment and monitoring of sustainable forest management, with special reference to criteria and indicators related to biological diversity and to socio-economic aspects.

46. Forest management unit-level criteria and indicators are being tested and monitored in field trials in a number of countries, such as Finland and Canada. The trials are testing the relevance, applicability and practical possibilities to assess and monitor identified indicators. Based on practical experiences, the links and compatibility between forest management unit and national-level criteria and indicators are reviewed and analysed.

47. Canada has been instrumental in the establishment of "model forests" in Argentina, Chile, Japan, Mexico, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America, in addition to several provinces in Canada, 11 in total. The "model forests" are living laboratories to test the field application of scientifically based criteria and indicators. Japan has held two international workshops on the theme "Model forests for field-level application of sustainable forest management".

FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2000

48. At its fourth session, IPF made a number of proposals for action on items related to the assessment of the multiple benefits of all types of forests. A list of activities and initiatives, denoting the advances made against those proposed actions, was provided in the report of the Secretary-General to IFF at its second session on programme element I.a (E/CN.17/IFF/1998/2). The following is a summary update on actions taken by FAO and its partners:

(a) A number of national and subregional capacity-building workshops and expert consultations have been held or are scheduled to take place. These will contribute to the quality of national-level forest resource assessments and FRA 2000;

(b) Under FRA 2000, a revision is planned of the FAO forest inventory manual, and techniques are being developed for assessing forests available for wood supply and deforestation processes in developing countries through advances in geographical information systems and remote-sensing technology;

(c) Progress is being made in the collection of a core set of information on a broad range of forest values,

including non-timber values, for all developing and industrialized countries;

(d) Memoranda of understanding have been developed between FAO and a number of key international organizations, countries and other organizations with competence in assessments to contribute to FRA 2000 and to share the results of the assessment effectively with the international community. A global strategic plan for global forest resources assessments has been developed;

(e) A core set of harmonized definitions for forest and related aspects of forests has been developed for global reporting of FRA 2000, and progress has been made on the harmonization of definitions for forestry within FAO and external cooperators such as the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, the European Union and the World Bank;

(f) IUFRO is proposing to sponsor a forum to address the issue of information systems.

49. There is no doubt that the periodic assessment of forest resources, such as that undertaken by FAO in cooperation with other Task Force members, will become increasingly important as the only assessment which is currently undertaken with a global scope. There is an increasing demand for reliable and timely data on forests from many legally binding instruments, as well as other policy forums, such as those dealing with food, agriculture, energy, environment and water.

50. It is clear that many developing countries require technical and financial assistance to enhance their capacity to conduct forest resource assessments, as well as to constructively and efficiently use the information generated for policy and field operations planning. Over the next biennium, the forest resources assessment programme will further increase its emphasis on building country capacity.

B. Integration of reporting systems among processes and instruments

51. As described in the note by the Secretariat on programme element I.b prepared for the second session of IFF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized and convened in March 1997 in Israel an expert meeting on synergies in national implementation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development agreements.[4] The meeting concluded that forest assessment, as an area of overlap among a number of international agreements, could provide an opportunity for identifying a core data set on forests to serve the need for information for each of these instruments. Developments since the holding of that meeting point strongly towards the need for the formulation of common definitions of terms and indicators in order to minimize confusion and eliminate inefficiencies in the current reporting situation, not only in instruments but for other reporting processes as well.

52. With current financial constraints both at the national and international levels, it will be imperative to find ways and means to integrate and streamline assessment and reporting among different processes and mechanisms. It is neither efficient nor cost-effective to set up new data collections and reporting mechanisms specifically for a particular process or instrument, disregarding what is already available. The strain of reporting requirements is already considerable on national institutions, and only limited public funding and financial assistance is available for capacity-building in assessment and monitoring.

53. The global forest resources assessment programme outlined above regularly reports on the location and extent of forest resources, and on net changes in extent, quantity and quality of forests over time. It thus constitutes an existing mechanism, which supports the stated requirement for countries to review, monitor and report on forests and forest-related issues. There is, however, a need to continue dynamic action to identify common elements of information needs related to forests, with special reference to harmonizing action among existing instruments, arrangements and mechanisms, and criteria and indicator processes. This will involve continued efforts in the development of agreed-upon data collection protocols, accelerated efforts in country capacity-building, as well as identification of emerging needs for information.

54. In the report of the Secretary-General on programme element II.d (iv) (E/CN.17/IFF/1999/11), it is also suggested that the Forum consider endorsing and promoting the development of a global forest information service that would integrate a wide range of information providers at all levels. That proposal is described in detail in the report of the International Consultation on Research and Information Systems for Forestry submitted by the Governments of Austria and Indonesia for official distribution at the third session (see E/CN.17/IFF/1999/17).

C. Involvement of major groups

55. As described in the note by the Secretariat on programme element II.c (E/CN.17/IFF/1999/6), there are many non-governmental organizations, mostly scientific and environmental, involved in reviewing, monitoring and

reporting on forests. It is clear from the initiatives already under way that future monitoring, data collection and assessments will be costly and warrant new participatory approaches, especially at the field level. It could be useful to explore ways and means to engage forest owners, local populations and private industry in forest assessments. Considering the extent of forest land under private ownership, mobilizing the help of forest owners and industry is essential, and would have to be preceded by training and distribution of simple technical guidelines for data collection, preferably through extension.

D. Technical, financial and political constraints

Technical constraints

56. As already noted by IPF, not all indicators of sustainable forest management are easily assessed. Some may only be assessed through proxy parameters. It was also agreed, however, that ease of quantification and importance of a parameter may not often coincide, and it was further stressed that the fact that a parameter was difficult to measure should not lead to its elimination if it was considered to be an important component of sustainable forest management.

57. IPF recognized that it was difficult to quantify a wide range of forest values, and noted that that shortcoming is due to the inability to fully assess the nature and significance of biophysical, ecological, economic and social impacts resulting from forest change and to the uncertainty about how to assess their costs (see E/CN.17/1997/12, para.95). Therefore, there is a recognized need to continue the development of indicators, including proxy indicators, which provide reliable evidence of progress towards stated objectives and which are technically feasible to measure and quantify. This relates to forest assessment, criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management, and the proper valuation of forest goods and services.

Financial constraints

58. IPF and IFF at its second session noted that assessments are costly and place a heavy burden on developing countries and international organizations. The widening scope of forest assessments will, in most cases, make those significantly more expensive to carry out. However, many developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and even some industrialized countries, are already encountering great difficulties in fulfilling existing reporting requirements. Financing of existing and future reporting obligations under international instruments, therefore, needs careful consideration. Increased synergies of forest-related reporting under different instruments would create significant efficiencies in the use of human, institutional and financial resources. As noted above, this could be accomplished by increased efforts in inter-agency collaboration at both the international and national levels.

59. Financial resources are already allocated towards reviewing, monitoring and reporting activities required under existing instruments, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other organizations. Those efforts could be better used, especially for forest-related information and data gathering, through better use of existing mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels instead of establishing new institutions and processes.

Political constraints

60. Reporting on the state of forests may represent a considerable political dilemma for many countries. Information on forests may be sensitive in terms of national security, status of indigenous people, land rights and tenure, forest concessions, extent as well as legal and de facto status of protected areas, trade in protected species etc.

61. Other political constraints include different interpretation of existing information by different interested parties. Conversion of forest land may be considered progress in the food and agricultural context but not necessarily by conservation groups. The same may apply to road construction, hydroelectric dams etc. The reliability of data may be challenged by internal as well as international groups and organizations. There may also be considerable constraints in the kind and amount of detail that private industry and forest owners as well as individuals would wish to reveal for competitive reasons, and this could lead to internal political problems.

IV. Preliminary conclusions and options for further action

62. The primary value and benefits of reviewing, monitoring and reporting on forests have to be accrued at the national level. Institutional, technical and human capacities must be built on the premise to strengthen a country's capacity to monitor the state of its forests for the purpose of measuring policy effectiveness and progress towards sustainable forest management as well as identification of areas in need of priority intervention.

63. The value of information lies in how it is organized, analysed, synthesized and reported. Approaches to strengthen capacities have to be pragmatic and cost-effective, while primarily serving subnational and national needs. Resources need to be coordinated and mobilized around existing mechanisms.

64. The proliferation of demands for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on forests, such as under instruments, from agencies, criteria and indicator processes or the Commission on Sustainable Development, underscores the need for harmonization of concepts, terminology and of data collection, organized in a hierarchical system that permits aggregation at the eco-regional, regional and global levels.

65. As a point of departure a mechanism using the FAO national forest programmes surveys, as outlined above, and the Commission's national reporting has been suggested for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on strategies, policies and initiatives launched in support of management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The *State of the World's Forests*, FRA 2000 and in due course criteria and indicator initiatives would provide vehicles for reviewing, monitoring and reporting on the state of all types of forests. Collectively, these provide adequate information on which to base intergovernmental forest policy deliberations and forest assessments. In the year 2000 that assessment will be accomplished at its fourth session by the Forum, which will then forward its findings to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eighth session. Depending on the decision on further action to be taken by the Commission in 2000, the Forum may wish to consider the following options:

(a) The forest-related information needed for assessments in legally binding and non-binding instruments, as well as by organizations, such as FAO, needs to be coordinated and harmonized at all levels. Opportunities for synergies need to be explored to avoid duplication and to harmonize concepts, definitions, terminology and methodologies. One option would be to build on the ITFF experience and establish an inter-agency secretariat working group of experts to design a harmonized framework for forest-related information;

(b) Funding by such bodies as GEF, FAO and UNDP that is directed towards assessment and reporting on biodiversity, climate change, desertification and transboundary pollution, needing forest-related data, should include capacity-building in already existing forest-related assessment and information-gathering activities at all levels, rather than establishing new mechanisms;

(c) The outcome of the discussions on international arrangements and mechanisms under programme element III will influence the final recommendation of the Forum vis-à-vis reviewing and monitoring. Whatever the outcome of those deliberations, it would be desirable to build upon existing monitoring, reporting and assessment arrangements and to recognize the need for their substantive strengthening at the national, regional and global levels.

Notes

[1] For further information, contact the National Reporting Unit, Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, at: <<www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo>>.

[2] See "Information note on international criteria and indicator initiatives" (FAO Forestry Department, December 1998).

[3] ITTO Policy Development Series, No. 7 (July 1998).

[4] See "Synergies in national implementation: the Rio agreements" (UNDP Sustainable Energy and Environment Division, 1997).